Don’t Understand by baguette_avocat

Category: IT (1990), IT (2017), IT - Stephen King
Genre: Alternate Universe - No Pennywise, Coming of Age, Eddie has anxiety, Fluff and Angst, M/M, Mostly Fluff, POV - Third Person, Period-Typical Homophobia, Richie is a disaster bi, Slow Burn, eddie is 12, eddie is in gay denial, ill put warnings before any chapters that have panic attacks and similar behaviors in them, im hoping to incorporate it soon, richie flirts but it’s in a kid way, richie has adhd, richie is 13, tagging for the future, theres a reference to him but it’s vague and doesn’t count, they actually act like kids, very cute very wholesome, will tag as needed, with undertones of angst
Language: English
Characters: Beverly Marsh (mentioned), Eddie Kaspbrak, Maggie Tozier (mentioned), Richie Tozier, Sonia Kaspbrak, Stanley Uris (mentioned)
Relationships: Eddie Kaspbrak/Richie Tozier
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Summary:

“Eddie Kaspbrack didn’t really understand dating. He was twelve for crying out loud! Why did he need to date anyway? It’s not like he was getting married anytime soon. He just didn’t get what was so amazing about being in a relationship.”

or

The one where Richie really wants Eddie to realize he’s flirting with him, and Eddie just doesn’t get it.

1. PARTY TIME (Introduction)

Author's Note:

> Join me as I delve into the Reddie Hell Hole for the first time! Let me know if you see mistakes or get confused by something! Encouragement helps, too ;)
>
> I hope you enjoy!
>
> ~valor

Eddie Kaspbrack didn't really understand dating. He was twelve for crying out loud! Why did he need to date anyway? It's not like he was getting married anytime soon. He just didn't get what was so amazing about being in a relationship.

That was what always went through Eddie's head during these kinds of situations. He was at a family gathering, albeit an incredibly small one, for a cousin's birthday. He'd mostly been stuck inside the spare bedroom, his mother too paranoid to let him interact with any of the other few cousins that were playing games outside.

His mother had come to get him when it was time for presents and cake. Eddie didn't pay much attention, though, and was thoroughly disappointed that he had to sit and eat with the rest of the family. It wasn't that Eddie didn't like his family; Eddie just wasn't interested in having conversations with them. All of his cousins were a fair bit older than him, and all of the older relatives only wanted to talk about boring stuff.

"So, Eddie," a relative he didn't recognize asked, "got a girlfriend yet?" He had his eyebrow raised in an amused expression.

Eddie shook his head. "No, sir."

The man nodded, making the same expression. "Are there any cute girls in your class?"

Eddie shook his head again. "No, not really."

The man's eyebrows shot up in feigned astonishment. "Really? None at all?"

Eddie did his best to keep a neutral tone, not wanting to be rude but getting very irritated at the insistence. "No, sir."

The man laughed, lightly patting Eddie on the shoulder. "Don't worry, champ. You'll definitely be a teen heartthrob."

Eddie tried a polite smile, ignoring that he had no clue what the word heartthrob meant. He excused himself in favor of the guest bedroom, picking up where he left off in the book he had brought. He had read three chapters before his mother told him it was time to go home, an occurrence Eddie never would have thought he'd be excited for.

During the entirety of the drive home, he stared quietly out the window and watched the scenery. His thoughts consisted of wishing he were home, wanting to play with Richie, and his conversation with his relative. He decided to focus on the second one.

Sure, Richie was annoying as all Hell, but he was still Eddie's best friend. Eddie couldn't remember a time when they weren't friends, and he was sure Richie couldn't either. Sometimes it surprised Eddie that his mother would let him hang around Richie. While he wasn't a necessarily bad kid, he was still pretty mischievous. He had endured many talks from his mother about how much she hated Eddie playing with him, but she had never once told him that he had to stop.

His thoughts shifted back to his conversation with his relative. Richie would probably laugh at Eddie, saying that he had his eye on at least seven girls in their class. Eddie shook his head, not really wanting to think about that. Maybe it was because Richie was thirteen while Eddie was only twelve. Maybe thirteen was the age that he'd start getting crushes and wanting to have a girlfriend, too.

Eddie let out a breath, watching as the sky started to turn pink and orange. He'd been gone for the whole day, and quite frankly, he really missed Richie. He hadn't even gotten to tell Richie that he was leaving, as his mother had only told him that morning about the party. Eddie hoped that Richie wasn't mad at him.

Eddie must have fallen asleep, because soon the car was parked in the driveway and his mother was telling him to get ready for bed. Eddie groggily walked up to his bedroom and took off his jeans, too tired now to put on a pair of pajama pants. Thankfully, he'd worn a button up with a white t-shirt under it, so all he had to do was take off the button up and flop into bed. In no time, Eddie had fallen back asleep.

Notes for the Chapter:

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2. TREE-WINDOW BREAK-IN

Summary for the Chapter:

> "Eddie woke up to the sound of a rock hitting his window. He scrambled out of bed, looking out the window to see what had happened. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw that it was only Richie. Eddie quietly opened the window, sticking his head out. Richie waved up at him, a smile on his face."

Notes for the Chapter:

> Let's get this fic started babey!
>
> My worst pet peeve when reading a fanfiction is when the characters, who are usually young, do the whole dramatic love-story stuff. That isn't how real life is!! They're kids, dawg!! All they know how to love is winning at Monopoly or the movie they're watching!
>
> On a more lighthearted note, I hope y'all enjoy the second chapter! I've set this whole "Richie is more serious/soft than he acts like he is" headcanon subplot deal thing. Let me know if it seems off, though! I'm trying to keep our same ol' Trashmouth, just with more feelings! :)
>
> ~ valor

Eddie woke up to the sound of a rock hitting his window. He scrambled out of bed, looking out the window to see what had happened. He let out a sigh of relief when he saw that it was only Richie. Eddie quietly opened the window, sticking his head out. Richie waved up at him, a smile on his face.

"Eds!"

"Richie, what are you doing!"

Richie laughed. “Can I come up?”

Eddie stared at him for a moment. He didn’t even know what time it was. What if his mom heard them? What if he and Richie fell asleep and his mom saw them in the morning?

“Yeah,” he said instead.

He watched anxiously as Richie climbed up the oak tree in the front yard, faster than he should have been able to in the dark. The path was probably etched into his brain from how many times he’d done it. As he got closer to the window, Eddie stuck his hand out. Richie tentatively took hold, letting go of the tree and reaching to put his palm on the window with the other.

With Eddie’s help, Richie’s feet landed safely on the windowsill. He grabbed the underside of the window with both hands, Eddie holding his feet in place. When Richie gave the okay, Eddie carefully let his legs slide in through the window. It wasn’t a very elegant method, but with practice it had become quite fast, and Richie always told him not to fix what wasn’t broken. Once Richie was inside, he fixed his glasses and gave Eddie a blinding smile.

“Where’ve ya been?” Richie asked quietly.

Eddie ignored the question. “What are you doing here? What time is it?”

Richie’s smile faded. “Like, midnight?” He looked down at his fidgeting hands. “Wanted to see you,” he added quieter.

“Couldn’t you have waited until tomorrow?” Eddie said as he closed the window.

Richie faltered, mouth opening and then closing. He seemed to be debating with himself. Finally, with a sigh: “I guess.”

Eddie looked at his open door. “What if you’d woken up my mom?”

Richie didn’t answer, picking at his fingernails. Eddie sighed. “It’s okay, Richie, really. I’m glad to see you.”

Richie looked up at Eddie, who gave a small smile before going to close the door. When he turned back around, Richie had quietly sat himself on the edge of Eddie's bed, looking at his hands again. Eddie sat down next to him.

"So, what's up?" Eddie asked, prompting Richie to look at him.

He shrugged. "Nothing, I guess. I just didn't see you at all today."

Eddie frowned. "Yeah. I didn't know I wasn't gonna be here."

"Where were you?"

"Cousin's birthday."

"Oh."

They sat quietly. Eddie wasn't sure what was going through Richie's head, but he was relishing in the comfortable silent togetherness. He'd never tell the other Losers, but Richie was pretty calm when the two of them were alone. Mostly calm, anyway.

"Do you think your mom would let you stay over tomorrow night?" Richie said, breaking the silence.

Eddie shrugged. "Maybe."

"I guess I'll have to be extra sweet to her," Richie winked.

Eddie playfully pushed at Richie's arm, failing at hiding his giggling. Richie's face lit up, as it always did when Eddie's resolve crumbled and let his amusement at Richie's jokes show through. He was annoying, yes, but somehow Eddie thought his jokes were funny. Maybe it was because he knew exactly how Richie really felt about his mother.

"Was this something you'd already had planned?" Eddie asked. "Or is it because I was gone."

Richie's cheeks turned a shade of pink. "C'mon, am I not allowed to spend time with my Eddie Spaghetti?"

Eddie snorted. “Don’t call me Eddie Spaghetti, and maybe I’ll say no.”

Richie’s cheeks seemed to darken a shade, and Eddie laughed. Richie softly bumped his shoulder into Eddie, only making Eddie laugh more. Richie was laughing, too, despite the obvious try at looking angry.

“You’re so mean,” he said, poking Eddie’s cheek.

“And you’re so dumb,” Eddie said back, swiping at Richie’s hand. “Is that all you wanted?”

Richie raised an eyebrow. “Huh?”

Eddie smiled lopsidedly. “Did you just want to ask if I could stay over? Or is there something else you came here for?”

Richie looked at Eddie for what seemed like too long, face serious. It was as if he was examining Eddie’s face, and while Eddie didn’t necessarily mind, it made his stomach feel a little weird.

Before he could ask if he was alright, Richie smiled brightly. “No, that’s all I needed! Thanks for lettin’ me in, Eds.”

Eddie pushed Richie as he stood up. “Don’t call me Eds, Richie. Need help getting down?”

Richie looked at the window, then down at Eddie. “If you’d be so kind.”

Eddie rolled his eyes, helping Richie open the window and holding his waist as he swung a leg out. He dipped his head out of the window, using one arm to hold the underside of the window and swinging his other leg out in the process.

“You good?” Eddie asked quietly, seeing Richie freeze.

Richie just nodded. “Tryna mentally prepare myself.”

A few more seconds, and Richie told Eddie he could let go. Eddie watched with a held breath as Richie planted a foot on the windowsill, reaching out to grab the branch he’d gotten through

with. Eddie didn't let himself breathe until Richie had both feet on the branch below.

"Be careful," Eddie urged quietly.

"Don't worry, Eds," Richie whispered back. "I won't let a simple tree best me in front of my lover."

"Ha ha, Richie. Very funny." Eddie rolled his eyes, but Richie wouldn't have been able to see him anyway. "You seem to have forgotten that my mom is asleep right now."

Richie looked up at Eddie, halfway down the tree already. Eddie would have sworn he saw Richie wink along with his smile. "I know."

Eddie sputtered, watching as Richie jumped down from the tree onto the ground with a quiet grunt. Richie waved up at Eddie, not long enough for a response, and ran down the street toward his house. After a few seconds, Eddie shook his head and closed the window, opening his door again and climbing back into bed. No, Richie wasn't a necessarily bad kid, but he was definitely a mischievous one.

Notes for the Chapter:

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3. A BIT OF BANTER

Summary for the Chapter:

> "The day was going by way too fast for Eddie's liking. Miraculously, his mother had agreed to let him sleep over at Richie's, so long as he didn't participate in any of Richie's 'dangerous activities'. These activities consisted of riding his bike down steep hills, climbing trees, going anywhere near the woods, watching inappropriate movies, and more."

Notes for the Chapter:

> Welcome back!
>
> I hope all of y'all had a good turkey day, and that you didn't get beaten up by a grandma in Walmart on Friday!
>
> Thank y'all for being patient with me. I really do wanna make this the best that I can do, even if it is just for fun.
>
> As always, I hope you enjoy!
> ~ valor

The day was going by way too fast for Eddie's liking. Miraculously, his mother had agreed to let him sleep over at Richie's, so long as he didn't participate in any of Richie's "dangerous activities". These activities consisted of riding his bike down steep hills, climbing trees, going anywhere near the woods, watching inappropriate movies, and more.

When Eddie told this to Richie, he had laughed. "What, does she think I'm going to corrupt your innocent, virgin mind?"

Eddie had pushed him away, face red and Richie cackling. "Beep beep, Richie!"

Now, they were laying in Richie's living room, wedged inside of a

pillow fort that was probably much too small for the two boys, having to crane their necks uncomfortably to see the TV. Thankfully for them, they weren't really paying attention to the movie that they'd started.

Eddie picked up a few bits of popcorn that had fallen onto the cushions they were laying on, dropping them into the empty popcorn bowl in front of them. Richie was telling him about how Beverly had laughed soda out of her nose the day before.

"And then," Richie said dramatically, "she started laughing, and the soda shot straight out of her nose onto the table!"

Eddie scrunched his nose, practically feeling the horrible sting. "That sounds awful," he said.

"Oh, she said it hurt like Hell, but it was funny as all fuck!"

"It's so gross, though! Think of how much bacteria got on the table! Did you guys clean it up?"

"Yeah, don't worry." He shrugged. "Stan wouldn't let me lick it off the table anyway."

Eddie yelped, pushing Richie's shoulder as best he could in the confines of the fort. In response, Richie rolled onto his back, laughing. Once he'd calmed down, he folded his hands behind his head and gave Eddie a smile.

Eddie rolled his eyes. "You're the worst."

Richie only smiled bigger. "You know you love me."

"Yeah, sure," Eddie said, snorting. "You keep believing that."

The two grew quiet, Eddie watching the TV for a few minutes. When he looked back down at Richie, he felt his ears grow warm. Richie quickly averted his eyes, his whole face a dark pink.

Eddie watched him for a few moments. Before he could ask about it, though, Richie squeezed his eyes shut and blurted out: "I was just looking at how dumb your face looks."

Eddie rolled his eyes, letting out a puff of air in annoyance. “Sure thing, Richie.”

“Does your mom know that freckles can be cancerous?”

“What?” Eddie blinked. “What are you talking about?”

Richie still didn’t look at him. “You have freckles on your neck and shoulders. Knowing your mom, she’d think you have cancer or something.”

Eddie didn’t know what to say. He was fairly certain he didn’t have cancer, and he knew Richie was too. “Why?”

Richie shrugged. “Because she’s a paranoid-“

“No, Richie!” Eddie interrupted with a laugh. “Why are you bringing it up?”

Richie’s face returned to its previous pink shade, and he shrugged again. His expression was one of irritation. “I dunno, I just am. It doesn’t matter.”

Eddie stared at him. He wanted to ask Richie why he was so defensive, but he knew better than to try. “Alright. I was just wondering.”

Richie didn’t respond. Eddie waited for a few more seconds, but when Richie still didn’t reply, he got up to use the bathroom and to give Richie his space. Sometimes, he just needed some alone time to mellow himself out. Eddie knew this. Richie didn’t do well in the rare occasion that he was flustered, and Eddie wasn’t mean enough to tease him for it while they were alone.

When he went back into the living room, Richie had vacated the fort and was attempting to take out the movie. A quick glance at the clock told Eddie that it was about ten, and so he assumed they were getting ready to head into Richie’s room for the night. He offered to put the pillows and blankets away, to which Richie just nodded, and helped get all of the popcorn pieces off of the floor.

Once they were finished cleaning, the two went upstairs and into

Richie's bedroom. It was a familiar room, safe and very much Richie. Eddie wasn't sure what that really meant, but it was the only way he could think to describe it. While his mind was on things that he didn't understand, he remembered the word his relative had said to him at the party.

"What's a heartthrob?" Eddie asked out loud, seemingly to no one.

Richie, who was changing into a way too big t-shirt, tensed. "Why?" He asked.

Eddie shrugged, pulling his sweater off and messing up his hair. "One of my relatives said that he was sure I'd be a teen heartthrob."

Richie jumped onto his bed and laid flat on his back. "It just means the ladies will be all over you." The usual teasing humor of his voice seemed to be lost.

Eddie finished changing into his t-shirt and shorts, getting on the bed next to Richie. Instead of laying down, he opted to sit cross-legged by Richie's stomach, facing him.

"That doesn't sound very fun."

Richie propped himself up on his elbows, eyebrow raised. "What'd'ya mean?"

Eddie shrugged, looking around the room as he thought. "I just... I just don't find it very appealing. I don't know."

Richie stared at him, expression unreadable. "Fair enough," he said finally, plopping himself back down and folding his hands behind his head.

It was Eddie's turn to stare. "Wait, aren't you gonna make a joke or something?"

"Not really. Why?"

"Why?" Eddie repeated. "Because you always make jokes about this kinda stuff."

Richie hummed. “Don’t feel like it tonight.”

“Did I upset you or something?” His fingers found their way to the hem of his shirt, playing with it.

Richie laughed. “No, Eds. You didn’t upset me.”

“Then why...” Eddie trailed off, not sure of how to verbalize the string of thoughts that were floating inside of his head.

“I just don’t feel like it tonight.” Richie smiled softly at him. With a wink, he added: “Appreciate it while you can, Eds.”

Eddie laughed quietly. “You’re a mess.”

Richie’s face lit up, as if it was the most endearing compliment he’d ever been given. “I know.”

Notes for the Chapter:

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4. LATE NIGHT CHIT-CHAT

Summary for the Chapter:

> “It was well past midnight before the two boys decided that maybe they should try to get some sleep. Richie made sure there were enough pillows on his bed, straightened up his bedside table so that Eddie could put his watch on it, and turned off the lights. As Richie wiggled himself under the sheets, Eddie closed his eyes and took a deep breath.“

Notes for the Chapter:

> Heya! I made the hard decision to cut this part into two chapters. I’m fairly confident about this first section, and I really wanted to post something tonight. I’ll admit that this chapter is way too short for my liking, but I’m hoping y’all’ll bear with me and take this shorter chapter in return for a longer one next chapter. I hope y’all understand!
>
> As always, I hope y’all enjoy reading my fic!
>
> ~ valor

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“Hey, Eds?”

“Don’t call me Eds, jackass.”

“Do you think it’s weird that we sleep together?”

Eddie’s voice faltered. “No? Why? Do you think it’s weird? I’ll sleep on the floor if you want me to, Richie.”

Eddie could tell by the way the bed dipped and squeaked that Richie had sat up. “No no no, that’s not what I meant!”

Eddie opened his eyes, turning to face Richie. “What’d’ya mean, then?”

“It’s just…” Eddie didn’t think he’d ever seen Richie look so irritated. “Well, my mom told me that we were getting a little old to be sharing a bed. She said it was weird, at our age, whatever that means.”

“Oh.” Eddie was sure that his own mother would throw a tantrum if she discovered that the two boys shared beds. “Do you want me to start bringing a sleeping bag?”

Richie shook his head. “I told her I thought it was nice. I like having you with me,” he added, voice growing softer. “It’s nice, just knowing that you’re here.”

Eddie felt his ears heat up. It wasn’t typical of Richie to let himself be vulnerable like this with anyone, including Eddie. Richie flipped onto his side, his back toward Eddie, and pulled the covers practically over his head. “G’night,” he said quickly.

Eddie didn’t move. He was unsure of what he wanted to say. Even though the odd behavior worried Eddie somewhat, it also gave him a warm feeling and a tightness in his chest that he was having a hard time placing. He wanted to respond, to tell Richie that he didn’t think it was dumb, but how?

“I love that you’re being all serious and stuff, Richie.” He spoke slowly, unsure of himself. “I just don’t know how to respond, I guess.”

“It’s fine,” Richie said quickly, muffled under the covers. “You don’t have to.”

“I like it, too, sharing a bed,” Eddie paused, taking in a breath, “but I know that it’s not something that boys our age usually do.”

When Richie didn’t respond, Eddie decided that it would be best to try to fall asleep. It was never really hard to, when he was with Richie, but this time it seemed harder than usual. He kept feeling a

nervous energy bounce around inside of his stomach, with no way to get it out. It took a good while before Eddie had finally fallen into sleep.

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5. A LITTLE TOO TOUCHY-FEELY

Summary for the Chapter:

> “The next morning, Eddie woke up to find himself alone in the bed. He deduced that Richie had went to the bathroom, and so to occupy himself, he combed his fingers through his hair as he waited. He had actually gotten his hair to look relatively presentable, when Richie came back into the room. He looked a little flustered.”

Notes for the Chapter:

> Hello y’all! Decided that I was just gonna rip off the bandage and post, because if I keep over-analyzing this chapter, it will never get posted!
>
> This chapter has more of an angsty tone, I suppose, than the other chapters. Let me know if anything seems off! I wanna make sure y’all like reading it as much as I love writing it!
>
> As always, I hope you enjoy! Let me know what you think, if you’d like!
>
> ~ valor

The next morning, Eddie woke up to find himself alone in the bed. He deduced that Richie had went to the bathroom, and so to occupy himself, he combed his fingers through his hair as he waited. He had actually gotten his hair to look relatively presentable, when Richie came back into the room. He looked a little flustered.

“Mornin’, Eds.”

Eddie groaned, but he was smiling. “I hate it when you call me that.”

Richie shrugged. “Get used to it, sweet cheeks,” he said smugly. “Once me and your mom get hitched, you’re gonna hear it all the time.”

Eddie laughed. “And I don’t already hear it all the time?”

Richie jumped onto the bed. “You mumble in your sleep, y’know.”

“Do I?”

“Mhm.” Richie was on his side, head propped up with a fist. “It’s cute.”

Eddie’s ears grew warm. “No, it’s embarrassing. I didn’t say anything too weird, did I?”

Richie laughed. “Not really. I couldn’t hear most of what you were saying anyway.”

“I have a feeling that you’re lying.”

“Maybe. Maybe not.”

Eddie pushed on Richie’s chest. “Fuck off.”

Richie grabbed Eddie’s wrists, laughing as Eddie fell on top of him. Richie hooked an arm around him and began poking at his sides. Soon Eddie was reduced to a giggling pile of irritation, every so often managing to grab a hold of Richie’s hands and demand that he stop. This never lasted, however, as Richie had no trouble freeing his hands from Eddie’s grasp to continue tickling him.

“I hate you,” Eddie announced once Richie had finally let him go.

“Love you too, Eds.”

“Don’t call me that!”

They went downstairs, raiding the cabinets for the cereal necessities. They ate with minimal interaction, relishing in the quiet peacefulness of each other’s company. Eddie knew that even though he would never admit it, Richie loved when it was like this; Just the two of them sitting quietly with each other.

They got dressed after they ate, deciding to hang out in Richie’s front yard. Eddie had brought cargo shorts and a striped polo, at which

Richie laughed, asking if Eddie even owned anything else. Richie just had on his typical jeans and printed button up over a white t-shirt. Neither boy put their shoes on, challenging each other to see who could jump down the stairs from the highest step as they left. Eddie had only jumped three steps, Richie jumping four.

“It’s because you’re taller,” Eddie complained as they ran outside. “Your legs are longer than mine!”

Richie ignored him, falling onto his back and laughing. Eddie simply sat down cross-legged next to him, feeling the grass tickle at his legs. They didn’t talk for a good few minutes, just relishing in the cool morning breeze and the smell of freshly cut grass.

It wasn’t long, however, that Richie started fidgeting with a patch of clovers a few feet away from where they were sitting. He ended up rolling onto his stomach, Eddie opting to just stand up and walk over. Instead of sitting down next to him again, though, Eddie carefully rested his arm on Richie’s back, using him like an armrest, to which Richie let out an exaggerated moan.

“You’re impaling my lungs!” He cried dramatically, pulling a giggle out of Eddie. “Tell your mom I love her!” With that, he made a “bleh” noise and closed his eyes, tongue sticking out.

After a few seconds of badly hidden giggling from Eddie, Richie opened an eye just enough so that he could see him, his suppressed grin going bigger. Eddie laughed, rolling his eyes.

He poked at Richie’s cheeks, and then tapped on his shoulders for a little while, Richie letting out a quiet laugh. Eddie watched him carefully, wondering if his humming was of a specific tune. After a few moments, Richie closed his eyes. A plan of revenge formulated inside of Eddie’s head, and he quickly switched to tickling at Richie’s neck. Richie let out a betrayed squeal, quickly flipping himself over, Eddie now practically in his lap. He didn’t have time to think about it, though, because Richie was already prodding at Eddie’s sides.

“Don’t think you can get away with that, Spaghetti Man,” Richie proclaimed in a light voice, Eddie’s resolve crumbling into a fit of giggles and gasps for air. “The penalty is death by tickling!”

Eddie pushed at Richie's chest, earning him a few laughs, but was ultimately powerless against Richie's wiggling fingers. Somehow, Eddie found himself lying on his back, Richie above him and poking at his sides. Both boys were in a fit of laughter, Eddie occasionally yelping Richie's name and telling him to stop, but there was no real bite behind the requests.

Eddie had managed to grab a hold of one of Richie's hands when someone yelled his name, making both boys freeze. After barely even a second, Richie scrambled up off of Eddie, scooting a few inches away and clasping his hands together in his lap. Eddie looked toward the source of the voice, finding his mother getting out of her car, looking more horrified than anything.

"Eddie, what in the world are you two doing?" She was already tilting Eddie's head up at a painful angle, inspecting his face.

"I'm fine, Ma," he said as best he could with his face being squished and his airway being constricted. "Really, I am."

His mother didn't seem convinced, though to Eddie's relief she released him and stood up. This relief was immediately replaced with fear, watching as his mother marched over to Richie, who had moved a few feet farther away. This fear morphed into boiling anger as he watched his mother grab Richie by his t-shirt. She yanked him up off the ground, not letting go of his shirt as she began to yell.

"What in God's name do you think you're doing, roughhousing with Eddie like that?"

Eddie stood up. "Ma, it's fine!"

His mother ignored him. "Do you know how badly you could have hurt him? You could have triggered an asthma attack! You could have hit his head on something! You probably already did, you little demon child!"

"Stop!" Eddie ran over, grabbing his mother's arms and prying her hands off of Richie. He got in between the two, Richie instantly taking hold of Eddie's arm. "He didn't hurt me, Ma, I'm fine! We do that kind of stuff all the time!"

Eddie regretted the words as soon as they came out of his mouth. His mother's eyes went wide with shock, and then thin with anger. Eddie was scared that she would grab Richie again, but she grabbed his shoulder instead, Richie's grip on his arm tightening momentarily.

"I want you home now," she said sharply, pushing Eddie toward the car.

Eddie protested, saying that his things were still inside of Richie's house, but it was no use. He climbed into the car, not noticing that his mother had walked back to Richie until he closed the car door.

"Do not touch him again," his mother yelled, Richie flinching. "And God forbid I catch you on top of him like that again, you dirty little heathen! Do you understand me?"

Richie nodded. He'd never been good at standing up to Eddie's mom. "Clear as glass, Mrs. K."

Satisfied with his answer, she straightened her posture and put her hands on her hips. "You should be ashamed of yourself."

Eddie didn't hear Richie's response, but he assumed that it was a good one, because his mother huffed back to the car. He wanted to shoot an apologetic glance Richie's way, but Richie had already started trudging back into the house, head down.

As soon as Eddie's mother was situated in her seat, she started the car and gave Eddie a disappointed glare. He was all too familiar of this glare, having received it repeatedly throughout his childhood. To Eddie's surprise, though, she didn't say anything. She looked back at the road and began to drive off. He wasn't really sure why his mother had come to pick him up so early, though. She didn't usually get him until later in the morning.

His brain replayed the event over and over, analyzing each bit, until something started eating at Eddie's stomach; Something that his mother had said.

Do not touch him again. Eddie chewed at his lip, the image of Richie flinching looped in his head. Richie was never one to show he was

intimidated. Something like that only happened when he was caught off-guard or seriously hurt. He didn't see how either would apply.

Eddie knew that the concept of them never touching again was absolutely ridiculous. The two boys were always touching; Whether it be their knees when they were doing homework, or their arms when they were laying in the grass at night, or their heads and shoulders when it was late and one of them was tired. It was just something that they always did.

Imagining never being able to push Richie when he was being annoying or lean on him when he was sad was enough to trigger the threatening pressure of tears behind Eddie's eyes. Imagining Richie never putting his arm around him or ruffling his hair or poking his cheeks or tickling him ever again made his stomach tie itself up into knots. Just because it was annoying didn't mean that Eddie didn't somewhat enjoy the attention.

Eddie knew that there was another piece to the puzzle; A piece that he was deliberately ignoring; A piece that made him too sick to place. He didn't want to uncover the picture that lay locked within it. He tried not to think about that puzzle piece, focusing on the practically nonexistent scenery passing by.

Notes for the Chapter:

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6. FIRST DAY IN LOSER JAIL

Summary for the Chapter:

> "Much to Eddie's expectations, his next week would be spent sulking on his bed, glaring at the glow-in-the-dark stars Richie had gotten him for his eleventh birthday, and grumbling incoherently to himself. Eddie hated when he was grounded. He wasn't popular, no, but he knew enough people to know that his groundings were not of the typical fashion. When he was grounded, it meant he was grounded."

Notes for the Chapter:

> I know I said that it would be a few days before the next chapter came out, but I seemed to have had an epiphany and wrote this while I was at work.
>
> As always, I hope you enjoy!
>
> ~ valor

Much to Eddie's expectations, his next week would be spent sulking on his bed, glaring at the glow-in-the-dark stars Richie had gotten him for his eleventh birthday, and grumbling incoherently to himself. Eddie hated when he was grounded. He wasn't popular, no, but he knew enough people to know that his groundings were not of the typical fashion. When he was grounded, it meant he was grounded.

The first day was always the easiest. Eddie knew this. That was why he was very much not looking forward to the rest of the week. He was miserable, tens of hundreds of thoughts rumbling in his head, and the glow-in-the-dark stars were not enough to distract him. His room was too quiet.

While he was grounded, Eddie was only allowed to leave his room for meals and bathroom breaks. Eddie had never really thought anything of it until Richie told him how awful it was. He had said that when he was grounded he wasn't allowed certain toys and games, but he

was allowed to leave his room. After a brief survey, the Losers came to the conclusion that Eddie's mother was, for lack of better verbiage, a bitch.

Eddie scowled at the ceiling for a few more moments, shooting dull waves of anger throughout his body. He let out a groan, flopping his arms out dramatically. Sitting up, Eddie began mumbling to himself in irritation. He stood up, still mumbling, and began blindly feeling under his bed. His hand hit a box, and he painfully tried to pull it out. Shaking his arm out for relief, he put the small box on his bed and sat down next to it.

Eddie carefully opened the box, which was just a really old shoebox, and inspected its contents. On his tenth birthday, Richie had secretly gotten him two presents, one of which his parents hadn't known he had bought. Richie had said something about holding in emotions and how writing in a journal helped him sometimes. He'd given the gift in the unwrapped shoebox. They'd been under a tree.

Eddie pulled out the notebook, a simple white composition notebook, and one of the several pens he had collected. The front cover of the notebook held a mess of doodles and phrases, Richie having insisted that they decorate it. In the bottom right corner, a scribbled "R + E" was surrounded by a squiggly circle and stars. Richie's handwriting hadn't evolved much.

Eddie shifted so that he was leaning against his pillow, knees bent to make a makeshift tilted table. He flipped to a blank page, wrote the date, and put pen to paper to write what he was feeling. The only problem was that Eddie wasn't really sure what he was feeling. His hand hovered for a few more seconds, and when he couldn't think of the words he needed, he put the pen down next to him.

What was he feeling? He felt angry, but angry didn't sound quite right. He felt embarrassed, but about what he wasn't exactly sure. He felt a mystery soup of emotions, and he was certainly not a professional chef. He let his head hit the wall behind him, closing his eyes with a huff.

He felt like Schrödinger's Loser. He was feeling tens of emotions and yet he felt none at all. He had millions of thoughts and yet his mind

was blank. Maybe if he just didn't try to focus on it, he would find some clarity. Maybe it was the fact that he was actively searching for these thoughts and feeling that he couldn't seem to recognize any of them.

He forced himself to open his eyes and put the notebook and pen back in its shoebox, sliding it under his bed. He flopped himself down on his back, staring at the glow-in-the-dark stars on the ceiling. Richie had saved up for weeks to be able to buy them. His mother had told him that she would buy them, but Richie had been determined to buy those stars himself if it was the last thing he ever did. At least, that's what he had said while they were haphazardly sticking them to the ceiling later that night.

Eddie told himself to focus. Richie had nothing to do with the things he was feeling. It wasn't like any of this was Richie's fault! Eddie was sure that Richie would argue, but that didn't matter. None of this was Richie's fault. If only his mother weren't so paranoid.

Notes for the Chapter:

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7. SECOND DAY IN LOSER JAIL

Summary for the Chapter:

> "Eddie was laying on his bedroom floor, head propped up by a fist and legs bent in the air. His feet were crossed at the ankles, bobbing slightly. He had his notebook on the floor and a pen in hand, scribbling almost illegible words onto the page. His face was scrunched up, his focus strong."

Notes for the Chapter:

> Thank y'all for being patient with me on this chapter! I know it took a few days, but I had to map out how I wanted to do the next few chapters in terms of plot.
>
> I'm a little hesitant about this chapter for some reason, but as always I hope y'all enjoy!
>
> ~ valor

Eddie was laying on his bedroom floor, head propped up by a fist and legs bent in the air. His feet were crossed at the ankles, bobbing slightly. He had his notebook on the floor and a pen in hand, scribbling almost illegible words onto the page. His face was scrunched up, his focus strong.

Eddie's mother had always been excruciatingly protective over him, especially after his father died. Sure, Eddie knew that the experience must have been pretty unpleasant, but sometimes Eddie felt she was a bit too much.

Everyone but the Losers thought that Eddie's mother was just a typical helicopter mom, making him take vitamins every day and having him wear way too many layers when it was cold outside. Granted, the Losers knew things that everyone else didn't, like the time his mother took him out of school for a whole week during flu season when he was in third grade.

Eddie groaned as he documented how his mother forced him to keep the training wheels on his bike until he was eight. Unbeknownst to his mother, Richie had been letting Eddie practice on his bike since he was six. Sure, it had been a bit hard to explain the scrape on his arm from when he fell off that one time, but otherwise it had been an easily accomplished secret.

When he was nine, him and Richie had been playing kingdom in his front yard. Richie had collected a good few sticks, stabbing them into a soft part of the yard and claiming them to be his people. He then repeated the action in a different part of the yard, only this time for Eddie. He'd then announced that they were both kings of rival kingdoms, for reasons he had refused to reveal.

They found satisfactory sticks to use as swords, and then engaged in an exaggerated sword fight. Eddie wasn't really sure how long they had been pretend fighting, but it seemed sooner than later that Richie became antsy and declared that they "change things up." When asked how, he had simply held up a finger, telling Eddie to be patient. Eddie had huffed about it, but he hadn't really minded all that much.

Eddie had watched as Richie paced around, obviously thinking hard about what the two should do next. He was mumbling to himself, hands gesturing slightly, mouth moving as he breathed out words to himself. Eddie remembered how the sight had made him laugh, but not in the mean way. It was more in an admiring way, he supposed, though the word wasn't quite right.

Finally, Richie lifted a finger in the air with a theatrical "ah ha", and ran right up to Eddie with a big grin. Eddie's hand stopped, the recollection of how close Richie had stood and how he had grabbed Eddie's hand making him falter in his writing. He tried to ignore how warm his cheeks got and continued writing, having momentarily forgotten that he was supposed to be describing how unusually protective his mother was.

Richie had held Eddie's hand, dramatically bowing. In his pretend king voice, still holding Eddie's hand, he had said: "Someone from my kingdom needs to marry someone from yours so that we'll be friends. Since we're the only two playing, it has to be us."

Eddie had looked at him sideways for a moment before nodding. “Okay! If you want.”

Richie’s smile got bigger, and he once again dramatically bowed. This time, however, he kissed the backside of Eddie’s hand, making Eddie squeak and pull back his hand. Richie had looked a little stunned, cheeks a bit red and eyes very wide.

“Richie!” Eddie had whined. “Do you know how many germs your mouth probably has? A billion, at least!”

Richie had smiled again, laughing quietly as he stood up tall. “Oh, yeah. Sorry.”

Eddie stopped writing again, puffing his cheeks out and trying to ignore the flip of his stomach. Why was he feeling so embarrassed about it? It wasn’t like it was a bad memory, per se. Sure, it hadn’t ended too well, but he definitely didn’t categorize it as a bad memory. He didn’t even think it was embarrassing! If anything, he found it pretty funny.

After Richie had kissed Eddie’s hand, and after Eddie had complained about the germs, both of their parents had come out and subsequently scolded them. They said that it was unsanitary; that it wasn’t okay to do. Eddie hadn’t been too disappointed, seeing as he hadn’t had any intention of kissing Richie’s hand too.

Richie, on the other hand, hadn’t taken it as well. He hadn’t thrown a fit or anything, but his cheeks had been red and his fidgeting had been accompanied by furrowed eyebrows. He had even tried to argue for a bit, but there was no negotiating with their parents. They said their goodbyes and Eddie and his mother went back home. It had been dinner time, anyway.

Eddie stopped writing again, though this time on purpose. He thought for a moment, chewing his bottom lip. He may have gone a bit off track, he supposed, but he’d still gotten his point across. Though it wasn’t his best example, he had to admit.

Eddie didn’t have time to mull it over any, sneaking a glance at the clock and noticing that it was quite close to ten. His mother would be

telling him to get ready for bed any minute, Eddie reminded himself, and so he pushed himself up off the ground and put the notebook back in its box under his bed.

Author's Note:

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